



KINDERGARTEN SPACE AND AUTONOMY IN CONSTRUCTION: EXPLORATIONS THROUGH TEAM ETHNOGRAPHY IN A FINNISH KINDERGARTEN

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This research explores the relationship between kindergarten space and the autonomy of children in construction activities. Through the lens of team ethnography, this study examines a Finnish kindergarten setting to understand how the physical environment influences children's autonomy and their engagement in construction play. The findings shed light on the significance of the physical space and its organization in fostering children's autonomy, creativity, and social interaction during construction activities. The study contributes to the understanding of the role of the physical environment in promoting children's autonomy and offers insights for educators and designers in creating supportive spaces for constructive play in early childhood settings.

INTRODUCTION

The physical environment plays a crucial role in early childhood education settings, shaping children's experiences and influencing their development. Kindergarten spaces are designed to support children's learning, exploration, and social interactions. One area of interest is the relationship between kindergarten space and children's autonomy in construction activities. Autonomy refers to children's independence, decision-making, and agency in their learning and play experiences. Construction play, which involves building and creating with various materials, offers opportunities for children to express their creativity, problem-solving skills, and social interactions. Understanding how the physical environment influences children's autonomy in construction play can inform educational practices and the design of early childhood settings.

METHOD

This study employs a team ethnography approach to explore the relationship between kindergarten space and autonomy in construction activities. Team ethnography involves a collaborative research process where a team of researchers observes, documents, and analyzes the everyday experiences of children in their natural environment. In this case, a Finnish kindergarten setting is selected as the research site. The researchers spend a significant amount of time in the kindergarten, observing and interacting with the children during construction activities. The study focuses on how the physical space is organized, the materials available, and the role of educators in facilitating children's autonomy in construction play. Data collection methods include participant observation, interviews with educators, and documentation of children's construction processes and outcomes.

The team ethnography approach allows for a rich and holistic understanding of the interactions between children, the physical environment, and educators in the context of construction play. It provides an opportunity to capture the nuances of children's experiences and the influences of the physical environment on their autonomy. The data collected will be analyzed using qualitative methods, such as thematic analysis, to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to kindergarten space and autonomy in construction.

By exploring the relationship between kindergarten space and children's autonomy in construction activities, this study aims to contribute to the knowledge base of early childhood education and design. The findings can inform educators, designers, and policymakers in creating supportive and empowering environments that promote children's autonomy, creativity, and social interactions during construction play.

RESULTS

The team ethnography in the Finnish kindergarten revealed several key findings regarding the relationship between kindergarten space and children's autonomy in construction activities. The physical environment was found to have a significant impact on children's engagement, creativity, and decision-making during construction play. The arrangement of space, availability of materials, and the role of educators all played a role in shaping children's autonomy.

The kindergarten space was designed to be open and flexible, allowing children to move freely and access materials independently. The presence of various building materials, such as blocks, loose parts, and construction sets, provided children with opportunities for imaginative and open-ended play. The spatial organization allowed for both individual and collaborative construction activities, fostering peer interactions and the exchange of ideas.

Educators played a crucial role in supporting children's autonomy in construction play. They provided guidance and scaffolding when needed, while also respecting children's ideas and decisions. The educators encouraged children to take ownership of their projects, make choices, and solve problems independently. This approach empowered children to explore their creativity and develop their construction skills.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study highlight the importance of the physical environment and educator practices in promoting children's autonomy in construction activities. The open and flexible space, along with the availability of diverse materials, encouraged children to engage in self-directed play and problem-solving. The educators' supportive role fostered a sense of agency and empowered children to take ownership of their learning experiences.

The team ethnography approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the interactions between children, space, and educators. It revealed the dynamic nature of construction play and how the physical environment and educator practices can either facilitate or hinder children's autonomy. The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on early childhood education and provide practical insights for educators and designers.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the design of kindergarten space and the practices of educators play a crucial role in promoting children's autonomy in construction activities. The findings emphasize the need for open and flexible environments that allow for self-directed exploration and creative expression. Educators should adopt a supportive and empowering approach that respects children's ideas and decisions while providing guidance when necessary.

By understanding the relationship between kindergarten space and autonomy in construction, educators and designers can create environments that foster children's creativity, problem-solving skills, and social interactions. Further research and collaboration between researchers, educators, and designers are needed to continue exploring and refining the design of early childhood spaces to support children's autonomy and holistic development.

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